

# Summary...the Report on Youth Safety.

In the past year, news of students shooting students at school stunned all Americans. Just a few days after the tragedy in Springfield, Oregon, Governor Gary Locke and State School Superintendent Terry Bergeson announced plans for a Youth Safety Summit. They asked citizens to gather and share the best ideas from across the state for protecting our children from violence in their neighborhoods, schools, and communities.

*“We want to live in a world where childhood is a time of learning, a time of innocence, and a time of abundant unconditional love, all in an atmosphere of absolute safety.”*

—Governor Gary Locke  
Youth Safety Summit Remarks  
August 19, 1998

The Governor and Superintendent wanted to hear from parents, students, teachers, and citizens who were concerned about youth safety and civility. They invited experts in youth behavior and school safety, as well as people who work with troubled youth every day. They called on local organizations to sponsor community forums all over the state, and appointed a citizen advisory group to help organize information gathered from these meetings.

## **Nearly 3,000 citizens participated, including over 800 young people.**

Throughout June and July, 65 communities from 35 counties hosted community forums all across the state. Most forums began with presentations on safety and violence prevention in local schools and the community. The audience shared experiences, asked questions, and gave opinions on what is working and what needs to change in their communities. Discussions focused on the Six Pillars of Youth Safety:

- Youth Involvement
- Violence Prevention
- School and Community Support Structures
- Parents and Families
- School Safety and Security
- Media Roles and Responsibilities

The citizen advisory group met in early August to shape community forum ideas into recommendations for the Washington State Youth Safety Summit. On August 19, more than 400 citizens from all over the state attended the Summit in Tukwila to finalize the recommendations. Participants included representatives from community forums, legislators, parents, educators, and over 50 youth.

They learned that violent deaths at schools are extremely rare—only 1.5 per million students. Less than 1 percent of all homicides and suicides among school-age children were connected to school. Over half of America’s public schools experience at least one crime incident in a school year. But only 10 percent experience serious violent crime.

Participants listened to research findings about risk factors in children’s lives that predict violence and other problem behavior, and protective factors that help youth avoid this behavior. These risk and protective factors are found in individuals, families, specific settings like schools, and communities. Violence reduction strategies should address both risk and protective factors and focus on youth at the highest risk. Successful strategies also set specific goals and measure results.

*“We want kids  
to be excited about  
the opening of school  
and not worried  
about it.”*

—Superintendent Terry Bergeson  
Youth Safety Summit Remarks  
August 19, 1998

Summit participants also learned that state laws and programs invest millions of dollars in schools and communities to address violence and related problems like drug abuse. The initiatives on pages 13 through 15 help prevent these problems, intervene in the lives of children at risk, improve school security and community safety, and help parents and schools meet children’s needs.

The citizens attending the Summit used all of this information to develop 50 recommendations for improving youth safety and preventing violence. The recommendations on pages 16 through 22 range from sweeping social changes to very specific actions that address risk and protective factors.

Many communities use the principles expressed in the Summit Recommendations. For example, a Clark County program helps students expelled for violence complete their education and face their problem behavior. Orting, Sunnyside, and Mountlake Terrace organize youth activities that are more fun and safer than “hanging out” at night. In Bellingham, the First American Spirit Team supports cultural pride, leadership, and inspires kids to stay in school.

The Youth Safety Summit recommendations grew out of a community dialogue on safety and the causes of violence. They are a starting point for the work everyone—parents, educators, policymakers, the media, community leaders, and young people themselves—must do to improve the safety of our schools and communities.